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ABSTRACT

A multiple-choice test of English vocabulary and grammar was administered to college-bound Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking students studying English in Finland. Erroneous responses were analyzed to determine differences in learning strategies between the two groups. Swedish speakers were found to choose incorrect alternatives based on characteristics of their native language much more often than Finnish speakers. The latter showed the greater tendency to choose over-generalizing alternatives. Possible reasons for the differences in language learning strategies that are reflected in these results are discussed. The multiple choice test is appended. (JB)

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Kaj Sjöholm

DO FINNS AND SWEDISH-SPEAKING FINNS USE DIFFERENT STRATEGIES IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

Introduction

During the last few years contrastive analysis and error analysis based on formal comparisons between L1 and L2 have gradually yielded to research based on psycholinguistic models of language learning. There has been a shift of interest from the "linguistic product-level" to the "process-level". Instead of counting errors or contrasting L1 and L2 structures, linguists have, by means of various methods tried to identify the processes and strategies that might underlie the learners' utterances, which are said to constitute an interlanguage (Richards & Kennedy, 1977, Selinker, 1972, and Corder, 1976). The interlanguage (IL) is said to be a unique, dynamic linguistic system (rather than a defective form of the target language) resulting from the regular and systematic application of rules, strategies and hypotheses (Richards & Kennedy, 1977). The second/foreign language learning process is in other words viewed as an active, creative process, in which the learner is continually forming and testing hypotheses about the target language (TL) structure. (There is, however, some disagreement among linguists about the role played by the mother tongue, which is reflected in two theories about foreign language learning, i.e. the transfer model and the L1=L2 model. See Richards & Kennedy, 1977:10.) In doing so the learner is not believed to be acting randomly, but is probably working according to certain 'strategies' 'imposed' on him by his previous linguistic experiences, i.e. his native as well as the target language. (The strategies may of course also be due to extra-linguistic factors such as the learner's personality and general knowledge of the world. See also Miller, Galanter & Pribram, 1960.) It is the work of the linguist to find out what strategies the

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second language learner uses to acquire L2 and what factors influence the choice of strategies.

Some linguists maintain that the second language learner resorts to a strategy only when he faces some difficulty in the learning or communication process. According to this view a "fossilized" surface form originally resulting from L1 transfer should not be regarded as an indication of an underlying strategy, but simply as an instance of L1 interference (see Kellerman, 1977, and Selinker, 1969). A somewhat different view is held by Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker - henceforth TF&S - who maintain that the term "strategy" has been used ambiguously in the past to refer either to "learning strategy" or "production strategy" (TF&S, 1976). They want to avoid the undifferentiated form "strategy" altogether.

TF&S define "learning strategy" as a process of rule formation, i.e. "a tentative hypothesis which the learner forms about the nature of the L2, which is tested and subsequently modified" (TF&S, 1976:99-100). So learning strategies are, by definition, unstable, and change over time (TF&S, 1976:100). A "production strategy" is according to TF&S a more general process, which may, but need not necessarily, give rise to a rule (the result may for example be an avoidance strategy). They define "production strategy" as "a systematic attempt by the learner to express meaning in the TL, in situations where the appropriate systematic TL rules have not been formed" (TF&S, 1976:100). According to TF&S a production strategy can either be unstable (i.e. changing over time) or stable (fossilization). By adding the decoding dimension to TF&S's definition of production strategy, Tarone, Cohen and Dumas (TC&D) arrived at a reasonable definition of "communication strategy" (1976).

A very interesting view is put forward by Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1960), who maintain that the hierarchical nature of a complex task like a language skill requires the existence of plans or programs for its execution. If all the plans at the different language levels

(articulatory, syntactic, word-retrieval etc.) are selected so as to be in accordance with the target language syntax, semantics, phonology etc. and executed in accurate temporal integration, the result is well-formed, appropriate TL speech. The selection of wrong L2 programs, L1 or L3 programs, will of course lead to "errors". This model is probably also valid as an explanation of certain second-language learning processes.

One fact to be borne in mind is that experimental data are usually collected by means of different test formats, which, no doubt, affect the learner's responses. So what is interpreted as a production or learning strategy might, in fact, turn out to be a "test-taking strategy", defined as a well-organized approach to a problem in a language test. In this study TF&S's definition of a learning strategy as a general process embracing both hypothesis-formation and hypothesis-testing has been adopted. Although technicalities in the test (e.g. the test type, the instructions, the administration, the type of distractors in the MC-test etc.) may induce certain "test-taking strategies" among the learners it is, however, believed that the hypothesis-testing activity a learner is involved in when solving for example an MC-test, is essentially the same as the one used in a learning strategy. The fact that retrieval of information from memory seems to proceed most effectively if the same plan is used to seek it out as is used to store it, seems to support this view (Gregg, 1975:93).

Following from what has been said earlier, we may infer that part of the learner's internalized IL rules are identical with equivalent TL rules. To make this compatible with TF&S's definition of a learning strategy, it is assumed that these IL rules have resulted from verified hypotheses about the TL structure. If these rules are automated or available in the long term memory they are said to be mastered (Levelt, 1977). So from the point of view of L2, the learner is said to be <u>knowledgeable</u> (Kellerman, 1977). It is important, however, to distinguish between an observ-

er's and the learner's own evaluation of his L2 competence).

Automation is, however, not a necessary condition for the learner to be knowledgeable. If automation is not acquired, the execution of a speech act requires, however, a large amount of mental effort (on the part of the learner).

In those instances where a learning strategy does not result in an L2 rule, the learner is usually said to be erroneous. Errors of this kind that can clearly be traced to an identifiable strategy, could be called strategic errors. If these errors are not "fossilized", they usually change over time (i.e. they get more like the target language, if the learning proceeds normally). It should be noted, however, that correct responses may also be strategic.

Aims of the study

In this paper it has been assumed that there are at least two kinds of learning strategies: a) individual strategies, and b) strategies common to a group. Here we are going to deal only with the latter. Generally speaking we will be concerned with the following problem:

> Is there any relationship between the native-language background and the choice of foreign-language learning strategies?

One way of clarifying the relation for the learner between his L1 and the L2 is to compare groups with widely different language backgrounds. The conditions for research of this kind seem to be unique in Finland, where the bilingual situation enables us to compare Swedish- and Finnish-based IL data.[1] Swedish and English are, as is well-known, Germanic languages and thus closely related genetically as well as typologically, whereas Finnish and English are unrelated and typologically very different. As

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1 Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, which are not related to each other. Members of these two language groups have a similar educational and cultural background.

second language learning in this paper is viewed as the the learner's ability to form hypotheses about L2 on the basis of prior language knowledge, it seems reasonable to assume that the Finnish-speaking learner of English forms the hypothesis that his L1 rules are not usually applicable in English. On the other hand it seems quite reasonable to assume that a Swedish learner of English tends to form the reverse hypothesis, i.e. that Swedish rules are very often appropriate in English. Thus our first hypotheses are as follows:

> (1) Finnish-speaking learners of English tend to use a more "separative"[2] learning strategy (strategy of differentiation) than Swedish-speaking learners of English.
>
> (2) Swedish-speaking learners of English tend to use a more "assimilatory" learning strategy than Finnish-speaking learners of English.

The premise for making these two hypotheses is that the learner, at least to some extent, is aware of a relationship between TL and native language (NL) structures. If exposed to more than one foreign language he will probably have some notion of the structure of all the languages he has learnt. He will soon perceive which languages are typologically similar, and which are not. We may then postulate that the Finnish learner of English, who also knows Swedish, forms the hypothesis that rules of Swedish are usually also applicable in English. The Swede, who also knows Finnish, will on the contrary hypothesize that rules of Finnish are not appropriate in English. The next hypothesis we would like to test is therefore the following:

> (3) Finnish-speaking students tend to rely more on rules of Swedish (assimilatory strategy

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2 The term "separative" is here used to mean that the L2 learner is reluctant to transfer L1 rules/forms to the target language. "Assimilatory" means the reverse, i.e. an inclination among the L2 learners to transfer L1 rules/forms to TL. See also Kellerman, 1977.

relative to Swedish) when learning English than the Swedes rely on Finnish rules in the same situation (separative strategy relative to Finnish).

The above mentioned hypotheses would probably hold true primarily for data pertaining to syntactic structure. As far as vocabulary is concerned, the dimension of separative versus assimilatory approaches to foreign language learning seem to be fairly irrelevant if L1 and L2 are unrelated. (If L1 and L2 consist of two unrelated languages between which there has been a considerable interchange of loan-words, the situation is perhaps different. Also if the vocabulary data refer to word formation rules, semantic restriction rules and collocation we might perhaps speak in terms of separative/assimilatory strategies.)

Within the framework of a cognitive learning theory it has not been regarded as plausible to believe that Finns would tend to confuse a Finnish word and its English equivalent for formal reasons. This does not mean that the Finnish learner of English never makes use of language switches (i.e. uses Finnish words in English speech) or anglification of Finnish words in a language test or in a communication situation (cf. Ringbom, 1978). But I would not classify these errors as a reflection of learning strategies as they have been defined here (i.e. the TF&S definition). To me they seem to be occasional performance errors that perhaps could be described as some sort of desperation measure on the part of the learner to communicate a message or to do well in a language test (cf. Kellerman, 1977:99).

Description of the study

1. The population

The population of the study comprised 45 Swedish-speaking and 63 Finnish-speaking learners of English in Finland (where Finns and Swedes follow the same foreign language

syllabus). The two language groups had the same educational background, leading to a national matriculation examination. The marks in the final school reports and in the matriculation examination were approximately the same for both language groups, in English as well as in other subjects. Both language groups had had English at school for approximately 7 years. Furthermore it should be mentioned that the language data we are concerned with here, sprang from learning (not acquisition) in a formal setting in a country where English is not spoken. The data were collected in 1974 at the Department of English at Åbo Akademi.

2. The tests

The data used here were for the most part elicited from multiple choice items with four possible responses. The test consisted of a total of 60 items, 30 of which were lexical (see appendix 1). Of the remaining 30 items 15 were categorized as "grammatical" and 15 as prepositions. Though perhaps haphazard the items were chosen according to certain contrastive principles. On the basis of a structural comparison between L1 and L2 the number of items that gave one of the two language groups an "advantage", were equally distributed among Finns and Swedes. The majority of items in the section on grammar and prepositions probably did measure grammatical structure. Generally speaking, however, prepositions, particularly if verbal particles are included, constitute a problem because they are a borderline case between lexis and grammar. The limited number of prepositions[3] and the fact that very many prepositions, in fact, do express grammatical relations, makes it plausible that the L2 learner makes use of similar

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3 According to Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964:32) the restricted number of contrastive possibilities of 'system'-type choice is one of the main characteristics of grammatical structure. So some prepositions form part of grammatical systems, others are more or less lexicalized.

strategies when learning prepositions and syntactic rules. Of the vocabulary items 15 were completion items with L1 clues. Some of these items provided clues that were formally similar, but semantically different from Swedish (faux amis).

When interpreting scores resulting from MC-tests, it is important to remember that they are probably a bad test of the speaking, listening, and writing skills, and only a reasonably good test of reading comprehension. MC-items tell us something about the learner's intuitions about the L2 structures being tested, but does not yield any information about whether the structure is automated or not, or if it can be used appropriately in a communication situation. In other words, an MC-test of the kind being used here seems to reflect a cognitive knowledge of certain grammatical structures or lexical items.

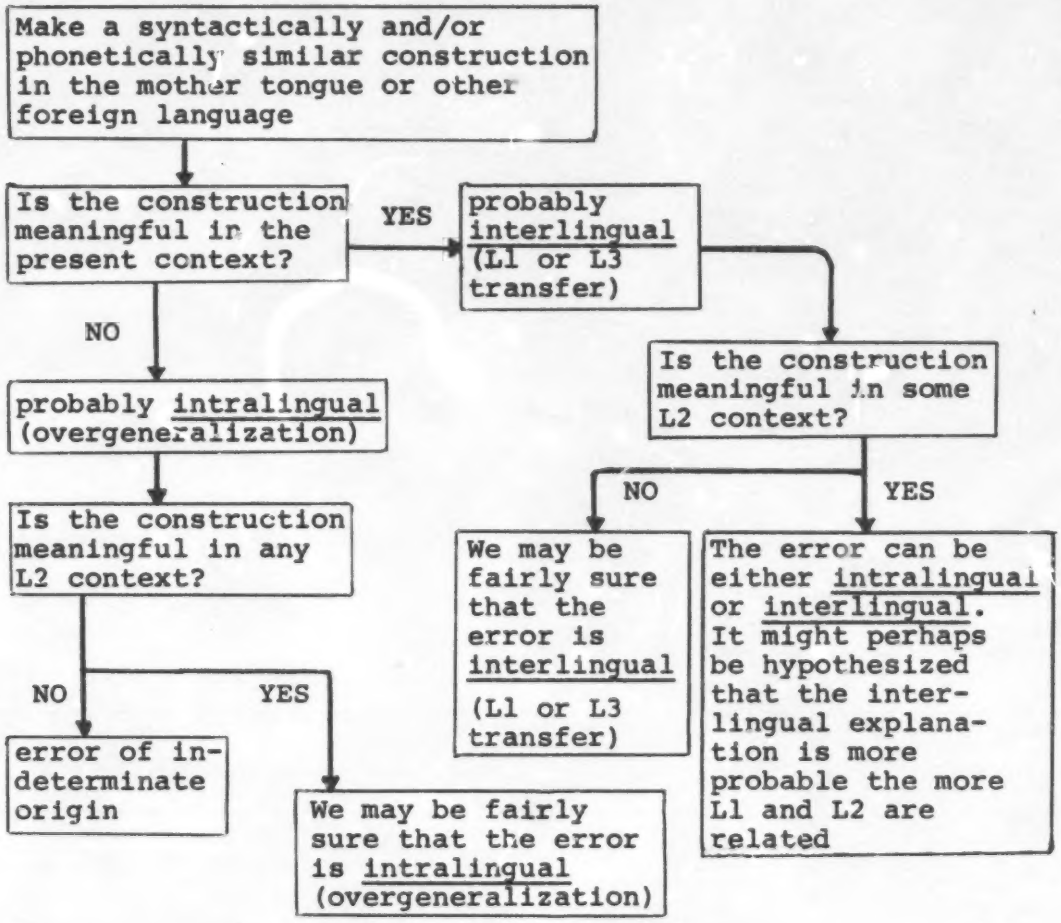
3. Principles in the elicitation of language data

A very important methodological question in this study is how to find trustworthy indicators of separative versus assimilatory strategies. It seems plausible, however, to assume that an "over-use" of L1-based responses should be an indication of an assimilatory approach by the learner whereas an infrequent occurrence of L1-based responses could be taken as a sign of a separative strategy. An L1-based response will here be defined as all the responses (distractors as well as correct alternatives) that could be a result of an L1 rule or if we are working with lexical items, when an attempted L2 response and the equivalent L1 item are formally similar.

In practice, however, the L1/L2 comparison was not rule based, but based rather on translation equivalents between L1 and L2. So if a grammatical feature or surface structure feature in L1 is marked in a similar way in one or several of the attempted L2 responses (i.e. chosen alternatives in a MC-test) these responses have been regarded as L1-based (+L1). The identification of the L1-based responses is of

course a hazardous matter. In this, however, I was greatly helped by the judgement of some Swedish- and Finnish-speaking informants (students of English) at a seminar. The following schema turned out to be of great help in the identification and classification of "errors". The schema derives a lot from Corder's (1971) error analysis algorithm and Levelt's (1977) didactical schema for error analysis.

Figure 1. Schema for classification of indicators of strategies (errors).


Make a syntactically and/or phonetically similar construction in the mother tongue or other foreign language
Is the construction meaningful in the present context?
YES
probably interlingual (L1 or L3 transfer)
NO
probably intralingual (overgeneralization)
Is the construction meaningful in some L2 context?
NO
YES
Is the construction meaningful in any L2 context?
We may be fairly sure that the error is interlingual (L1 or L3 transfer)
The error can be either intralingual or interlingual. It might perhaps be hypothesized that the interlingual explanation is more probable the more L1 and L2 are related
NO
YES
error of indeterminate origin
We may be fairly sure that the error is intralingual (overgeneralization)

Here follows a description of how a measure of strategicness is arrived at in this study. The data being derived from MC-items the first step is to detect all the alternatives (distractors as well as correct alternatives) that in

accordance with the principles described above are either Swedish- or Finnish-based (henceforth also called +Sw and +Fi). Knowing the number of +L1 alternatives (i.e. +SW or +Fi), the remaining alternatives are automatically -L1. Provided that all the alternatives (distractors) are equally attractive, which should be the case in well-functioning MC-items, the proportion of +L1 and -L1 alternatives in the test will give us the expected distribution of L1-based and 'non-L1-based' responses. The degree of difference between the expected frequency and the observed frequency could then be taken as a measure of strategicness.

The following formula has been applied:

$$\text{Degree of strategicness} = \frac{\text{+L1 expected}}{\text{-L1 expected}} : \frac{\text{+L1 observed}}{\text{-L1 observed}}$$

So if the ratios of +Sw/-Sw responses are 35/65 for the expected frequency and 50/50 for the observed frequency we get the following "strategy index": $\frac{35}{65} : \frac{50}{50} = 0.538$. If the index is 1.00, it indicates absence of strategicness. The more the index differs from 1.00, the more strategic the learners have been. In the fictive example above, the learners have been assimilatory, because a greater proportion (50%) than could be expected (35%) has selected +Sw alternatives.

Because it seems easier to detect indicators of strategies among the incorrect responses (distractors) than among the correct ones, these two groups have been analyzed separately. We do, after all, believe that the majority of the students who chose a correct alternative were, in fact, "knowledgeable" with respect to the item. But it is possible that a small proportion of the 'ignorant' students got the item right by guessing. I do, however, believe that these students had a "reasoned approach" to the problem, i.e. used a strategy so that blind guessing is merely an exception.

Results

1. Distractors (incorrect responses)

The first two hypotheses i.e. about the Finns being more separative and the Swedes being more assimilatory, supplement each other and have therefore been treated together. The distractors are the first object of interest. At least the following indicators have been thought to support hypothesis 1 and 2:

(1) If Finns tend to select 'non-Finnish-based' distractors proportionally more often than Swedes select 'non-Swedish-based'.

(2) If Swedes tend to select Swedish-based distractors proportionally more often than Finns select Finnish-based.

If it is a fact that Finns tend to avoid +Fi distractors, it seems plausible to believe that they resort instead to '+English' distractors, i.e. overgeneralization (or distractors based on languages related to English). So the third, somewhat dubious indicator for support of hypothesis 1 and 2 is:

(3) If Finns tend to select distractors that could be explained as overgeneralization proportionally more often than Swedes.

A MC-test containing 30 items of grammar and prepositions (appendix 1), constituted the data for our investigation. The figures in table 1 (next page), here arranged according to the principles described in the previous section of this paper, represent the first two indicators above.

Table 1. Expected and observed frequency[4] of Swedish- and Finnish-based distractors (in percentage) in an MC-test containing 30 items of grammar and prepositions.

		SWEDES		FINNS
		% of distractors		% of distractors
Expected frequency	+Sw	6.5% (23)	+Fi	9.0% (25)
Solution %: Sw 74.5 Fi 67.5	-Sw	19.0% (67)	-Fi	23.5% (65)
		25.5% (90)		32.5% (90)
		SWEDES		FINNS
		% of chosen distractors		% of chosen distractors
Observed frequency	+Sw	16.8%	+Fi	14.1%
	-Sw	8.7%	-Fi	18.4%
		25.5%		32.5%

Even a very superficial glance at the figures above suggests that indicator 1 and 2 hold true. The ratio between +Sw/-Sw and +Fi/-Fi is inversely proportional in the observed-frequency table. The majority of the Swedes (16.8%) have chosen Swedish-based distractors, whereas the Finns have tended to choose -Fi distractors (18.4%). To get a true picture, however, the frequency ought to be compared with the corresponding figures in the expected-frequency table. This comparison suggests that the Swedes show a very strong tendency to select Swedish-based distractors, but that

4 Expected frequency is derived from the actual number of +L1 and -L1 alternatives in the test. The expected frequency is adapted to the solution percentage and is based on the premise that all distractors are equally attractive. Observed frequency is the actual distribution of responses in the +L1 and -L1 categories.

the Finns also have a slight predilection for choosing Finnish-based distractors. In other words these figures seem to suggest that both language groups tend to be assimilatory in their selection of distractors, but the Swedes very much so. If we apply the formula referred to in the previous section we get these figures converted into a comparable measure of strategicness.

$$\text{Swedes} = \frac{6.5}{19.0} : \frac{16.8}{8.7} = 0.342 : 1.931 = \underline{0.177}$$

$$\text{Finns} = \frac{9.0}{23.5} : \frac{14.1}{18.4} = 0.382 : 0.766 = \underline{0.498}$$

One should, however, be wary of interpreting these figures too categorically. The subjective element in classifying distractors as +L1 or -L1 can never be completely removed.[5] We may also question the validity of an MC-test as an instrument for detecting strategies. Could these results be partly created by the test format? Even if the heavy reliance on L1-based distractors, which seems to be true of both language groups, is partly created by the test, the difference in the "strategy index" between Finns and Swedes cannot be explained away.

If the schema for the classification of indicators referred to earlier (p. 97) is followed, we cannot be sure that all these responses really reflect L1 transfer. The 'construction' might be meaningful in some other L2 context. This analysis showed us that 65% of the Finnish-based responses (distractors) could also be interpreted as overgeneralization.[6] When these responses were subtracted from all the original +Fi responses, we may be fairly sure that

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5 Here all the distractors resembling equivalent L1 forms in one way or the other have been interpreted as L1-based. It is of course quite obvious that a structural comparison of L1 and L2 data is not a sufficiently good device to reveal why a certain distractor has been chosen. The sources of an 'error' are probably more than one.

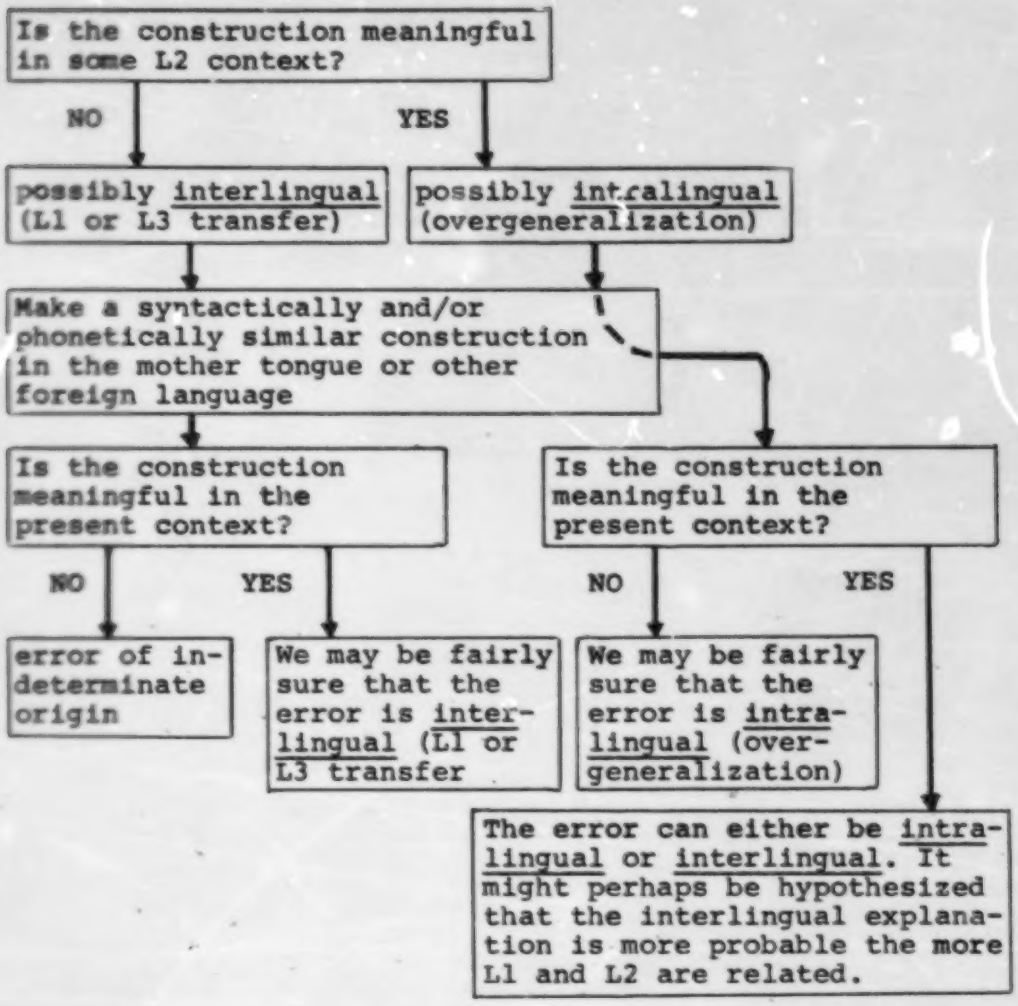
6 Here the term overgeneralization has been used rather loosely, i.e. when an L2 rule, form or even lexical item is used in an inappropriate situation.

the remaining responses did reflect L1 transfer. These "purely" Finnish-based distractors were chosen in accordance with the expected frequency and did not then indicate any strategicness. The distractors (65%) that could be interpreted as both overgeneralization (L2-based) and L1-based were, however, chosen considerably more often than expected. They indicated in other words a strategy. According to the schema for classification of indicators of strategies, the intralingual explanation (overgeneralization) is more probable when L1 and L2 are unrelated (as in this case). So the figures in table 1 that at first sight were interpreted as an indication of an assimilatory strategy, were in fact probably indicative of overgeneralization, which was expected among Finns.

Turning to the Swedes the "purely" Swedish-based distractors (responses) were also separated from the rest. Although the subtraction caused a slight decrease in strategicness, the pure +Sw responses were clearly assimilatory. The decrease is probably due to the fact that the majority of the subtracted responses (i.e. the responses that could be explained in terms of overgeneralization as well as L1 transfer) in actual fact were a result of L1 transfer, not overgeneralization (see the schema on p. 97). So provided that the categorization of indicators is correctly done, we may say that the figures in table 1 support hypothesis 1 and 2.

The overgeneralization responses were also analyzed separately. The following schema was used for the classification of indicators of overgeneralization (see also figure 1, p. 97):

Figure 2. Schema for classification of indicators of over-generalization.


Is the construction meaningful in some L2 context?
NO
YES
possibly interlingual (L1 or L3 transfer)
possibly intralingual (overgeneralization)
Make a syntactically and/or phonetically similar construction in the mother tongue or other foreign language
Is the construction meaningful in the present context?
Is the construction meaningful in the present context?
NO
YES
NO
YES
error of indeterminate origin
We may be fairly sure that the error is interlingual (L1 or L3 transfer
We may be fairly sure that the error is intralingual (overgeneralization)
The error can either be intralingual or interlingual. It might perhaps be hypothesized that the interlingual explanation is more probable the more L1 and L2 are related.

When all the responses that on formal grounds could be categorized as intralingual (overgeneralization) were considered, it turned out that Swedes as well as Finns tended to choose 'overgeneralization' more often than expected. The strategy indices were also very much the same for both language groups (0.588 for Swedes and 0.522 for Finns), but possibly indicated that the Finns had a somewhat stronger inclination towards 'overgeneralization' than the Swedes. We must not, however, give too much credit to these figures, because many of the above mentioned responses could equally well be described as L1-based. By excluding these responses

(i.e. the L1-based) from all the 'overgeneralization' responses, the remaining ones can be categorized as "pure" overgeneralization responses. The distribution of overgeneralization responses among Finns and Swedes is compiled in table 2.

Table 2. Expected and observed frequency of "pure" overgeneralization distractors (i.e. distractors that could equally well be described as L1-based, have been excluded).

		SWEDES		FINNS	
		% of distractors		% of distractors	
Expected frequency Solution %: Sw 74.5 Fi 67.5	+overg.	10.2% (36)		+overg.	12.7% (35)
	-overg.	15.3% (54)		-overg.	19.8% (55)
		25.5% (90)			32.5% (90)
		SWEDES		FINNS	
		% of chosen distractors		% of chosen distractors	
Observed frequency	+overg.	7.5%		+overg.	14.1%
	-overg.	18.0%		-overg.	18.5%
		25.5			32.5%

According to the schema in figure 2 we may be fairly certain that the responses in table 2 reflect overgeneralition. The figures in table 2 suggest that the tendency for the Swedes to choose overgenaralization distractors was, after all, illusory. When the responses that could be explained both in terms of overgeneralization and L1 transfer were removed, nothing of that inclination towards overgeneralization remained. The Swedes were on the contrary inclined to avoid overgeneralization (strategy index 1.6). So the strategicness among the subtracted responses probably did not reflect overgenaralization, but L1 transfer which was expected.

After the subtraction of +Fi responses, however, the Finns still showed an inclination to choose overgeneralization in the remaining responses (strategy index 0.841). The tendency is not very striking, but it is possible that the majority of the subtracted responses were indicative of overgeneralization rather than L1 transfer. Very striking, however, is the difference between Finns and Swedes in their selection of distractors. There seems to be a clear tendency among Swedes to avoid overgenaralization, whereas Finns have a slight preference for them.

The third hypothesis set up in this study was that Finns are more inclined to apply Swedish rules than Swedes Finnish rules when learning English. It is believed that the following indicator (indicator 4) to some extent supports hypothesis 3.

(4) If Finns tend to choose Swedish-based distractors proportionally more often than Swedes select Finnish-based.

The evidence in favour of indicator 4 is compiled in table 3.

Table 3. Expected and observed frequency of Swedish-based distractors among Finns and Finnish-based distractors among Swedes. (See footnote 7, next page.)

	SWEDES		FINNS	
	% of distractors		% of distractors	
Expected frequency	+Fi	4.8% (17)	+Sw	4.7% (13)
Solution %: Sw 74.5 Fi 67.5	-Fi	20.7% (73)	-Sw	27.8% (77)
	25.5% (90)		32.5% (90)	
	SWEDES		FINNS	
	% of chosen distractors		% of chosen distractors	
Observed frequency	+Fi	4.3%	+Sw	7.8%
	-Fi	21.2%	-Sw	24.7%
	25.5%		32.5%	

These figures converted to strategy indices (1.143 for the Swedes and 0.536 for the Finns) show no strategicness among the Swedes or if any, a slight reluctance to choose Finnish-based distractors. On the other hand it is quite obvious that the Finns have been fairly prone to select Swedish-based distractors.

Although table 3 indicates an inclination among the Finns to choose Swedish-based distractors, one should be wary of jumping to the conclusion that contact with Swedish is the reason for the choice. As a matter of fact it is very probable that even Finns who have never been in contact with Swedish would show a similar tendency to select 'Swedish-based' distractors. Finnish learners may have developed sufficient intuition of what English is like that distractors which happen to be Swedish-based are interpreted as very English-like and therefore chosen. This tendency to select +Sw distractors may, however, be strengthened by contact with Swedish.

2. Indication of strategicness among correct alternatives

As was suggested earlier it is rather difficult to detect strategicness among the correct alternatives. It must be assumed that those who got an item right are usually "knowledgeable" with respect to the item. Only some small number correct responses would not reflect "knowledge", but a guess that happens to be correct.[8] But a categorization of the correct alternatives in the same way as the distractors, viz. in Swedish-based, non-Swedish-based,

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7 Only "pure" distractors were included, i.e. all the L3-based indicators that could equally well be interpreted as L1-based were excluded.

8 From the point of view of the learner, it need not necessarily be a guess, but a belief. (It might for instance be an application of an L1 rule that happens to result in a correct surface form in this special case, but which in most contexts leads to an error.)

Finnish-based, non-Finnish-based and neutral (neither Swedish- nor Finnish-based) to some extent might be indicative of strategies. The solution percentages in the different categories and the differences between the two language groups have been compiled in table 4.

Table 4. Differences between Finns and Swedes in the solution percentage of different categories.

Category	Number of items[9]	Solution %		Difference	Solution%
		Sw	Fi		Sw+Fi
	+Fi				
+Sw	9 (1)	73.8	56.8	17.0	65.3
-Sw	21 (8)	74.8	72.1	2.7	73.5
	+Sw				
+Fi	9 (1)	69.7	66.9	2.8	68.3
-Fi	21 (8)	76.6	67.8	8.8	72.3
Neutral	13	78.0	75.0	3.0	76.5
Total	30	74.5	67.5	7.0	71.1

The solution percentages in the different categories are of course not comparable. But the differences in solution percentage between Finns and Swedes may be of interest. The difference is most striking in the category of Swedish-based responses (17.0). This difference may be due to chance, but a more plausible explanation is that some of the "ignorant" or less knowledgeable Swedes have got the item right by resorting to the transfer strategy, i.e. fallen back on Swedish. In other words the Swedes have also been assimilatory with respect to correct alternatives. The Finns, on the other hand, are not inclined to choose +Fi alternatives. The distribution of correct responses

9 The figures within parentheses indicate that the categories are not pure. So we find that in the -Sw category are included eight +Fi alternatives etc.

would appear to support hypothesis 1 and 2 (at least that Swedes are assimilatory). It is hard, however, to find any evidence in support of hypothesis 3 in table 4.

Discussion and concluding remarks

To sum up, it seems as if Swedes have a very strong inclination to select Swedish-based alternatives. This is true of distactors as well as correct alternatives. Although individual learners no doubt in some instances have resorted to other strategies, the figures presented in this paper suggest that the assimilatory strategy has been very dominant. What is also obvious from the figures is that the selection of MC-alternatives is different among Finns and Swedes. Generally speaking, it seems as if the Finns have been rather unstable in their choice of strategies. This irresolution is perhaps also reflected by the considerably greater variety of responses among the Finns. (Of the given alternatives 21% were never chosen by any Finn. The corresponding figure for the Swedes was as high as 45.5%).

This paper also indicates that distractors that can be described as overgeneralization have been resorted to somewhat more often by Finns. Furthermore the figures suggest the possibility that Finns to some extent apply Swedish 'rules' when learning English, though the evidence for this is somewhat scanty.

What do these figures tell us? The least we can say is that Finns and Swedes have reacted differently to this MC-test. The differences may be due to different approaches by the two language groups to the test (i.e. different test-taking strategies). I suppose that this is at least partly true. The next question is whether these figures could also be taken as a sign of different production strategies. "Production strategy", as we remember, was defined as "a systematic attempt by the learner to express meaning in the TL, in situations where the appropriate systematic TL rules have not been formed" (TF&S, 1976:100). At least to some extent we can extrapolate from a test-taking situation to

a communication situation. In other words the same general principles probably govern the learner's choice of L2 data in a communication as in a test situation (MC-test). These figures would then indicate different production strategies among Finns and Swedes (although the validity of the test is not outstanding).

Certain interlanguage strategies associated with production also apply to comprehension. This is not to say that comprehension and production data are identical. Because I believe that an MC-test by nature is more indicative of a reception skill than production, I assume that the figures in the test also reflect different communication strategies among Finns and Swedes.[10] ("Communication strategy" is defined by TC&D (1976:78) as "a systematic attempt by the learner to express or decode meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed".)

When interpreting the figures given in this paper it should be borne in mind that the indicators of strategies have been arrived at by means of structural comparisons of L1 and L2 data. The problem is whether the indicators arrived at in this way are valid as a reflection of learning strategies. (For a discussion of the problems with structural linguistic comparisons, see Jordens, 1977).

It might for example have been of great help if the participants in the tests had been questioned about the reasons for their choice immediately after the test. The most relevant information about learning strategies, however, would be obtained by following an individual learner's L2 performance and other activities for a couple of years. This has not been done experimentally. So the relevance of these results to learning strategies would be based on the

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10 It is obvious that these data can only reflect a small range of communication strategies. For classification of communication strategies, see e.g. Richards & Kennedy, 1977, or Palmberg, this volume.

assumption that the process of language learning is similar to the process of solving this test. But as the memory retrieval processes tend to be the same as the storing processes (learning), we believe that the data presented here is also indicative of learning processes (Gregg, 1975: 93). Despite the questionable procedure of 'error' identification used in this paper the figures may provide some insights about the general tendencies among Finns and Swedes when choosing 'learning' strategies as defined earlier in the text. It must be admitted that the reasons for an 'error' are probably more than one. But by strict adherence to the simplified schemas of 'error' identification described in this paper a comparison of the number of responses made by Finns and Swedes may provide some hint of what learning strategies are typical of each language group. Even if the identification of sources of errors is somewhat dubious, it seems obvious that the wrong identifications are equally distributed among both language groups and that the differences are still 'real'. The problem is that we cannot be completely sure to what extent (or if at all) the figures really indicate strategies of learning.

The concept of learning constitutes a problem in itself. How does it come about that an individual learner can add something to his previous knowledge and what brings about this change in his accumulated knowledge. Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1960:20) have used the term 'image' for an organism's prior knowledge. Changes in images can be brought about only by executing plans (which are essentially the same as a program for a computer) for gathering, storing, or transforming information. Two problems, at least, still remain to be solved. What is the relation between image and plan and what triggers off the execution of a plan.

We know that the groups we have been comparing in this paper differ with respect to images (the main difference is that of native languages, but other differences cannot be ruled out). It has furthermore been assumed that the different images in one way or the other affect both the

storing (learning) processes and retrieval processes of L2 data. The learner's perceived relation between L1 and L2 will give rise to his beliefs about the nature of L2. In this paper it has been postulated that Swedes will treat English and Swedish as essentially similar and therefore lean towards assimilatory strategies. Finns will on the contrary be inclined to treat Finnish and English as primarily different and the strategies chosen by Finns would consequently be separative. The figures presented in this paper appear to support this. Finally we might risk the genaralization that the more L1 and L2 are typologically similar, the more probable is the adoption of an assimilatory strategy in a learning and communication situation.

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APPENDIX 1: The test

Grammar and prepositions

Choose the most likely alternative, the one that fits in best with the sentence(s). Circle the corresponding letter.

1. Is it true that girls cry _____ than boys?

   a. easier c. more easily
   b. easily d. more easy

2. The teacher had to find out _____ the boys had been involved in the riot.

   a. the extent to which c. the extent to what
   b. to that extent d. to which extent

3. Though people call Harry a coward, he is not _____ is easily frightened.

   a. one, who c. one who
   b. such that d. such as

4. He did it without _____ it.

   a. my knowing c. that I knew
   b. that I knowing d. I knowing

5. Since it is so late, you _____ leave immediately.

   a. will better c. have better
   b. had better d. are better

6. He was regularly an hour late, but this time he was even _____.

   a. later than usually c. later as usually
   b. later than usual d. later as usual

7. The artist finished _____ when we entered his studio.

   a. to paint c. to painting
   b. paint d. painting

8. Unfortunately the repairs _____ be done this week.

   a. can possibly not c. can impossibly
   b. possibly cannot d. cannot possibly

9. _____, tell her I'm out.

   a. Should my sister come c. If my sister came
   b. If my sister would come d. If my sister will come

10. They are not used _____ at restaurants.

a. to eat
b. and eat
c. eating
d. to eating

11. We don't think it's necessary to have _____.

a. an own car
b. a car of ours
c. a car of our own
d. a car of ours own

12. Since there was a draught I asked the ladies if I _____ shut the window.

a. should
b. would
c. will
d. may

13. There is absolutely no doubt _____ the right person for us.

a. about he being
b. about him to be
c. about that he is
d. about his being

14. Haven't you seen _____ of the three sisters before?

a. none
b. any
c. anybody
d. somebody

15. Nowhere _____ find better strawberries than these.

a. will you
b. you will
c. cannot you
d. you cannot

- - - - - -

16. He just shrugged _____ shoulders after hearing the sentence.

a. his
b. at his
c. on his
d. about his

17. I am sure one gets _____ any destination in this country in two hours.

a. to
b. in
c. at
d. for

18. They started a collection _____ their own.

a. of
b. on
c. from
d. under

19. The soup is not _____ taste.

a. of
b. with
c. in
d. to

20. The man was not brave _____ nature, but sometimes he showed considerable courage.

a. of
b. by
c. from
d. out of

21. The lady is famous _____ her beauty.

a. of
b. from
c. for
d. over

22. Many people in Finland suffer _____ cancer.

a. from
b. of
c. for
d. by

23. "Did he live up to your expectations? Oh yes, he did so _____ a very great extent".

a. to
b. in
c. for
d. on

24. The value of a book does not depend _____ its size.

a. from
b. at
c. of
d. on

25. Charles did not reply _____ letters.

a. her
b. to her
c. on her
d. at her

26. What's the reason _____ his failure?

a. to
b. about
c. for
d. with

27. The boys sat down _____ the ground.

a. to
b. on to
c. on
d. at

28. These essays could not have been written _____ our students.

a. by
b. of
c. with
d. from

29. He was innocent _____ the crime.

a. for
b. to
c. of
d. from

30. I think he goes too far. He always intrudes _____ my privacy.

a. to
b. into
c. on
d. of

Vocabulary

In the sentences where the words are given in Swedish/ Finnish (within brackets), attempt to give a translation of the words within brackets that fits in best with the sentence(s).

1. Earlier he worked for his father, but last year he set up a _____ (affär/liike) of his own in another town.

2. The girl speaks no less than six languages _____ (flytande/ sujuvasti).

3. In the discussion our opinions differed so much that we arrived at no _____.

   a. concussion
   b. contraction
   c. consideration
   d. conclusion

4. When he applied for the scholarship he had to fill in no less than eight _____ (blanketter/lomaketta).

5. This rich man appears to have forgotten that man is _____ (dödlig/kuolevainen).

6. The young prince was _____ to lose his life the following year.

   a. predestined
   b. preceded
   c. prescribed
   d. presented

7. I feel I badly need some _____ (motion/liikuntaa).

8. The speed _____ (begränsning/rajoitus) is now 80 km/hour.

9. In his _____, Churchill gives a detailed account of the Boer War.

   a. memories
   b. recollections
   c. remembrances
   d. memoirs

10. When the old man died he had _____ (sparat/säästänyt) a great deal of money.

11. She does not seem to care what the children are doing, she seems to be completely _____ (likgiltig/välipitämätön).

12. Originally this firm had only five people working in their office, but now they have _____ so that more than thirty people are doing office work.

a. expanded
b. added
c. widened
d. re-established

13. I sprained my _____ (vrist/nilkka) when playing football yesterday.

14. I have got a bad cold, so I'm afraid we have to _____ (annullera/peruuttaa) the ticket reservations.

15. Michael _____ his throat carefully before he began to speak.

a. choked
b. cleared
c. opened
d. clarified

16. They work eight hours a day at this _____ (fabrik/tehdas).

17. He remained a _____ (ungkarl/vanhapoika) until his death.

18. They put up this _____ of Paavo Nurmi about twenty years ago.

a. status
b. statute
c. stature
d. statue

19. My cousin asked for a month's _____ from the Army when he took part in the Finnish Yatching Championships.

20. The wound in my arm almost made me lose _____.

a. conscientiousness
b. awareness
c. conscience
d. consciousness

21. The birds went flying high up in the air. Particularly the _____ seemed to be worried about their nests.

a. swallows
b. shallows
c. scarecrows
d. shells

22. Could you _____ this orange for me, please?

a. peel
b. scale
c. skin
d. flaw

23. Stephenson _____ (uppfann/keksi) the steamengine.

24. Although there had been no shooting for a few days, the truce wasn't _____: fighting soon started again.

a. immanent
b. permanent
c. continent
d. pertinent

25. Sarah was obviously very fond of her boyfriend: she even used to _____ (sticka/kutoa) him a pullover during the professor's lectures.

26. How peculiar he looks! I really think he must have something up his sleeve. This means that _____.

a. he probably has a secret plan
b. there is something wrong with his clothes
c. he must have been drinking
d. he hasn't had a proper meal for days

27. The elderly man over there looks very distinguished. This means that _____.

a. he looks so old that he will die very soon
b. he seems very worried about something
c. he keeps staring at something all the time
d. his looks are those of a fine old gentleman and command respect

28. Their summer house was built of _____ (stockar/hirsistä).

29. Since the man is exceptionally competent, we expect him to show a _____ knowledge of his subject.

a. profound
b. precautious
c. superficial
d. superstitious

30. Although the Romans were a great people they _____ their slaves in the most terrible fashion.

a. exempted
b. extorted
c. extracted
d. exploited